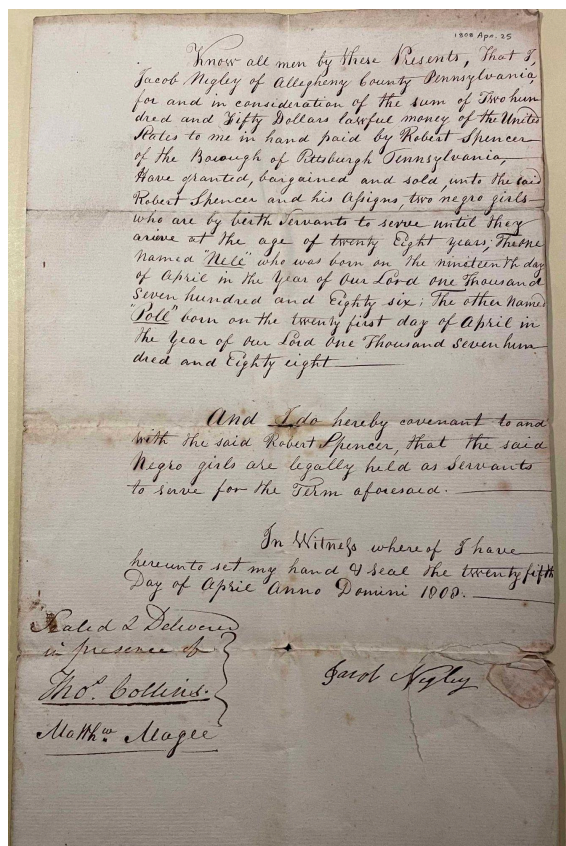


## Sam, Savara, Jack, Nell, Poll, Sukey, Isaac, Frank, Het, and Maria: How is ELPC called to repair?



*Baum Family Papers. Heinz History Center  
Detre Library and Archives, MS0110.*

An 1808 bill of sale for two women, Nell and Poll, was the starting point for East Liberty Presbyterian Church’s research into our tie to enslavement. The document, housed in the Heinz History Center Detre Library and Archives, records the sale of the women from the donor of our church’s land, Jacob Negley, to Robert Spencer for \$250. Under Pennsylvania’s Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, Nell (born 1786) and Poll (born 1788) would have had a combined 14 years of enslavement left until they reached age 28 and would be required by law to be manumitted.

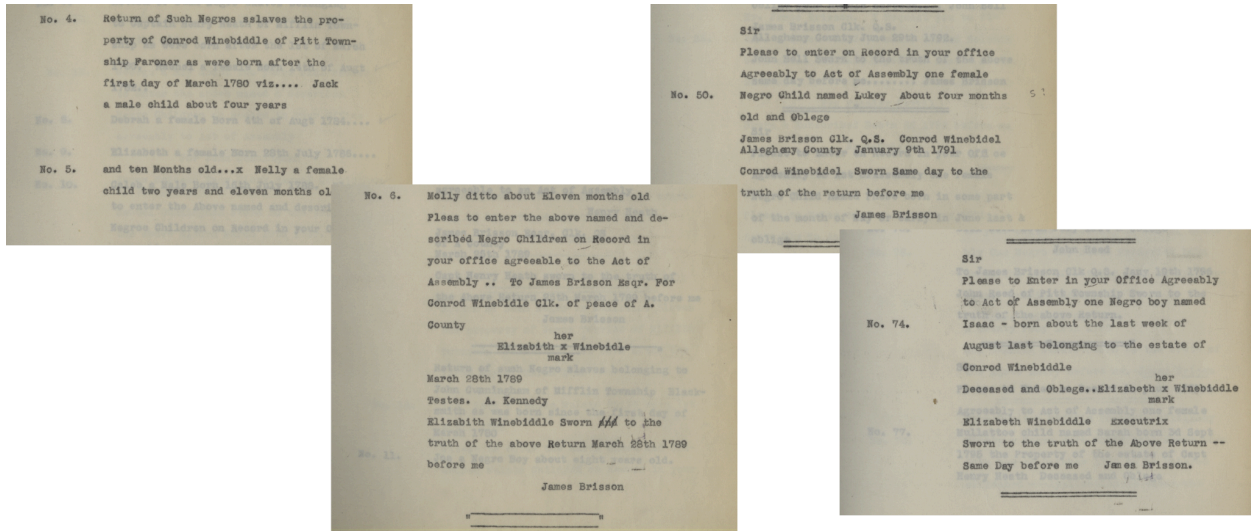
Between June 2024 and June 2025, we pieced together around 30 years and three generations of family history to learn more about Nell and Poll’s lives and experiences. On June 29, 2025, we presented what we had learned to the congregation to begin to ask how our church might be called to repair. As part of the presentation, we confronted popular and harmful myths: that Pennsylvania was a “free state,” that enslaved people were mostly unskilled laborers, and that enslavement in the

north was kinder and gentler than that in the south. We also demonstrated that the founding of our church and even Pittsburgh itself would not have been possible without the labor of enslaved people, including Nell and Poll and their family.

### 1785-1815: The Family’s Experience through the Lens of Property Documents

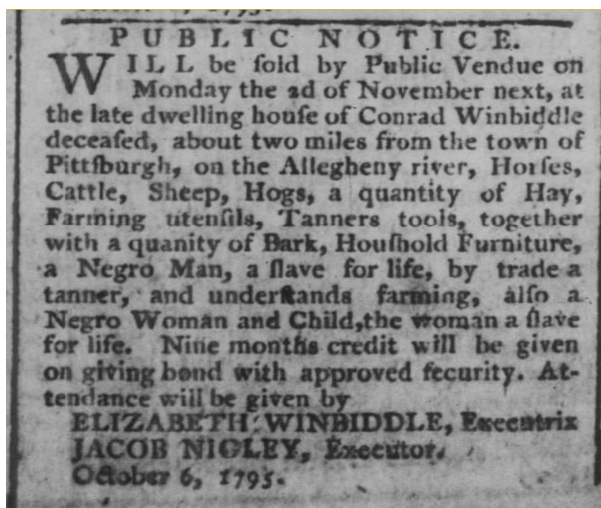
Most of what we can learn about Nell and Poll and their family is documented in property records—the records of human beings as property. Nell and Poll, born on Conrad Winebiddle’s plantation in what is now Bloomfield and East Liberty, were two members of a family enslaved and sold by Winebiddle, his daughter Barbara, and his son-in-law Jacob Negley. Although documents don’t explicitly state their family ties, details such as their living circumstances and

ages indicate that two adults enslaved by Winebiddle, Sam (born 1755) and Savara (born 1765), were Nell and Poll's parents. Three other children are documented along with Nell and Poll in a registry of births of babies to enslaved mothers in Allegheny County. These children, Jack (born 1785), Sukey (born 1790, likely died in infancy), and Isaac (born 1795), were almost certainly Nell and Poll's siblings.



*Schenkel, Edwin N. The Negro in Allegheny Co., PA. 1789-1813. 1931. Heinz History Center Detre Library and Archives, CASE E185.93.P41 S32 q*

The family was enslaved together on Winebiddle's plantation until 1795. Sam and Savara, born prior to 1780 would have been "slaves for life" while their children would have been enslaved until they reached the age of 28, a condition scholars often refer to as "term enslavement." Sam, a tanner, was a skilled tradesman who had likely built his skills over many years. Considering that Winebiddle had established his tannery in 1771, it is possible, and even probable that Sam was making leather during the American Revolution—supplying the patriots fighting under the banner of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and "all men are created equal" while he himself was enslaved.



When Winebiddle died in 1795, Jacob Negley and Winebiddle's widow separated the family, selling Sam, Savara, and 3-month-old Isaac away to farmer David Logan in Westmoreland County, while Jack, Nell, and Poll—still young children—were held as property by Negley's wife and mother-in-law in Pittsburgh.

*Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette, 1795.*

In 1808, the same year the Negleys finished the construction of their mansion home at present day Stanton and Negley Avenues, Negley sold Nell and Poll to Robert Spencer, a well-connected downtown tavern and inn owner. At Spencer's tavern, Nell and Poll would have attended to the needs of his customers and guests, including many revered Pittsburgh men. Spencer hosted many meetings of lawmakers, bank founders, and even the trustees of First Presbyterian Church, where he rented a pew as a member. About 6 months after Nell and Poll were sold to Spencer, Nell gave birth to a son, Frank, and in 1812, both women gave birth to daughters, Het and Maria, within about a month of one another. These children were recorded as Spencer's property in Allegheny County's registry of births of babies to enslaved mothers.

To the Clerk of the peace in and for the County of Allegheny in the State of Pennsylvania --- Robert Spencer of the Borough of Pittsburgh in the said County, Enters

No. 165. one Male Negro Child called Frank born the 10 November last of his Negro Women called Nell liable to serve untill twenty Eight years of age March 10, 1809

Robt Spencer

Allegheny County Ss

Robert Spencer upon his Solm oath Death Deposeth & say that the above Statement is just & true to the best of his Knowledge & belief. Robert Spencer

Sworn & subscribed before me 10 March 1809.....Presley Nevill Clk

To the Clerk of the Sessions of the said County

No. 188. Robert Spencer of the Borough of Pittsburgh enters on oath a female mulattoe Child Named Het" born of his Negro women Nelly" and liable to serve untill twenty eight years, born on the 9th Nov 1812. R Spencer Robert Spencer on his Solm oath saith that the foregoing is just and true to the best of his Knowledge & belief Sworn & subscribed before me this 1<sup>st</sup> R. Spencer 23d day of March A. D. 1813

R Pentland Clk

To the Clerk of the Peace of the County of Allegheny Robt Spencer of the Borough of Pittsburgh, returns to the said Clerk a female Mulattoe child called "Maria" born on or about the 15th December 1812, of a Negro Women called "Poll" the property of the said Robert Spencer & Liable to serve untill the age of Twenty eight Years.....Robert Spencer

No. 180. Allegheny County Sst

Before me Subscriber Clk of the sessions of Allegheny County personally appeared Robert Spencer of the Borough of Pittsburgh in the said County, who being duly Sworn according to law depositeh and saith that the above return is just and True to the best of his Knowledge & belief.....

Robert Spencer

Schenkel, Edwin N. *The Negro in Allegheny Co., PA. 1789-1813. 1931.*  
 Heinz History Center Detre Library and Archives, CASE E185.93.P41 S32 q

In 1813, as Nell was nearing the end of her term enslavement, Spencer sold Poll to William Wilkins, an attorney and rising politician for whose family Wilkinsburg, Wilkins Township, and Wilkins Avenue are named. The bill of sale for Poll from Spencer to Wilkins says nothing about her daughter Maria. Perhaps Maria went with Poll even though she was not mentioned in the bill of sale, or perhaps she died in infancy. Although it was illegal under Pennsylvania's Act for the

Rec<sup>d</sup> of William Wilkins the sum of one hundred and twenty five dollars - In consideration whereof I grant, bargain and sell to the said William his executor, adm<sup>r</sup> and assigns a negro woman named Polly a registered servant till she arrives at the age of 28 years - To have and to hold the said woman during her unexpired time and untill she arrives at the age of 28 years which will be on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of April A.D. 1816 - And I do hereby covenant that the said woman Polly has and is liable to serve as aforesaid untill she arrives at the age of 28 years which will be on the said first day of April A.D. 1816 -

Wilkins, my hand and seal this 16<sup>th</sup> Aug<sup>r</sup> A.D. 1813 -

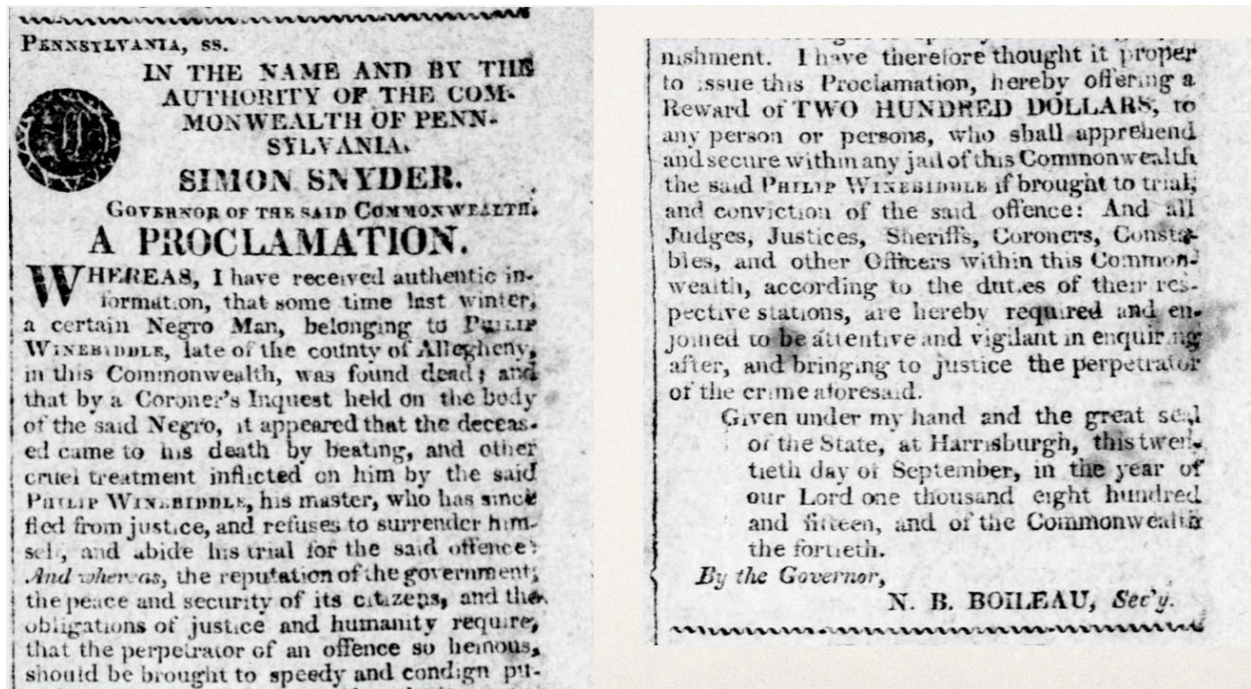
Robert Spencer

Hutchison-Wilkins-Wells Family Papers and Photographs,  
 1781-2005 (bulk 1781-1950) MSS 910, box 4 folder 16

Gradual Abolition of Slavery to separate mothers from their children younger than age 4, it is possible Maria remained at Spencer's tavern with her aunt Nell and cousins Frank and Het.

While Nell and Poll were enslaved in East Liberty and then downtown Pittsburgh, Savara and Isaac continued to be enslaved on Logan's farm in Westmoreland County. In 1815, David Logan died. In his will, he wrote that Savara and Isaac (then 20 years old) should become the property of his sons. The will did not mention Sam, who would have been 60 years old at that point. It is possible that Sam had died prior to Logan's death, that Logan sold him away, that he purchased his own freedom, or that he escaped enslavement.

The one member of the family we cannot account for after 1795 is Jack. Winebiddle's will specified that Jack was to be the property of his wife Elizabeth. Elizabeth died in 1803, and none of the documents associated with her mention Jack. One possibility we have explored is that Jack was passed to a family member, or sold to someone else and the records lost.



*Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette, November 1815*

There is also the possibility that Jack was murdered by Philip Winebiddle, Jacob Negley's brother-in-law. An 1815 proclamation from the governor of Pennsylvania tells us that Philip Winebiddle was wanted for the murder of a man he enslaved. The murder was so heinous that the governor offered a reward of \$200 for Winebiddle's return. In the trial that ensued, Winebiddle was acquitted. None of the official court records name the enslaved man, but an account in a book about prominent Pittsburghers tells the story of an enslaved man named Jack who was coveted by a prominent landowner in the same general area as the Winebiddles.

Enslaved by a man named James Horner, Jack was responsible for taking farm produce to market. When the covetous landowner offered \$700 to buy Jack from Horner, Horner instead emancipated Jack. Shortly after his emancipation, Jack was found dead in a clump of trees at the edge of Horner's property. In what seems too much of a coincidence, Horner testified for Philip Winebiddle's defense. Could this Jack be Nell and Poll's brother? Could the unnamed covetous landowner be Philip Winebiddle? We think this is likely.

Although we have found no further documents that can shed light on the family's lives after 1815, we continue to search. The search is complicated by the fact that none of the documents we have found provide a surname for Nell or Poll or their family members. We have one potential lead, though: a free Black man named Isaac in the vicinity of Logan's farm in the 1830-1850 censuses. The Isaac in the census matches Nell and Poll's brother Isaac in age, and Nell and Poll's brother would have reached the age of manumission in 1823. It is highly possible that this Isaac is the Isaac we are researching.

### **How is ELPC called to repair?**

ELPC's Reparations Ministry Team and Facing System Racism Committee acknowledge that our church still benefits from the stolen lives and labor of Nell and Poll and their family, and we are committed to the repair of truth, wealth, and power. Following our June 29, 2025, presentation, our team facilitated a discussion with congregation members, asking them to share their preliminary ideas for repair. Ideas that surfaced revolved around the three areas of truth, wealth, and power: publishing works and posting signs that acknowledge the stolen lives and labor of the family, directing money in our large endowment to Black-led initiatives and even individuals, and supporting the efforts of Black churches such as Bethel AME and our own Presbytery's Alliance for Honor and Repair. ELPC's reckoning with our history is an ongoing process that we acknowledge may never be finished.